

## Body farms: A field of opportunity

by Séamus Rudden

Human Taphonomic Facilities (HTF)—or as they are more commonly known, body farms—have grown in number since the first facility opened in 1980. As recognition of their utility grows, it is worth reconsidering their origins in light of the generative value they provide and the challenges yet to overcome. This paper examines the first HTF in depth, tracing how it came about and the advances it has made to the field of forensics. I address the ethical implications that body farms pose, but also the solutions they have to offer.

In this paper, I will examine Human Taphonomic Facilities (HTFs), also known as Anthropological Research facilities, or colloquially (and most commonly) as body farms. Humans have long been fascinated by our origins, anatomy, and physiology; however, our quest for knowledge has often been hampered by rules or cultural practices surrounding the proper treatment of human bodies. As a result, we often rely on analogues to provide insight into how humans function and how our remains decompose. Recent studies have questioned this long held belief, showing that findings gathered through the analysis of human-analogues provides much less reliable insight than previously thought, supporting the growing acceptance of the need to study actual human remains.

Research on human taphonomy is primarily designated as a subdiscipline of forensic anthropology. A relatively new discipline, research in this area only began forty years ago. Recognition of HTFs as a legitimate area of research has been slow, both in the eyes of the public and among fellow academics. However, in the last decade and a half, the number of facilities worldwide has significantly increased, as scholars have come to appreciate the value of conducting research on numerous contextual factors that

affect decomposition (Pecsi et al. 2020). Additionally, these facilities have become powerful tools for providing a hands-on learning-experience of forensic methods and proper field conduct.

Unfortunately, public perception of HTFs has been tainted by graphic and outlandish depictions in popular media. I will examine how representations in popular culture have affected the reception of human body farms, paying particular attention to how researchers have failed to overcome these portrayals. As a significant goal of HTFs is developing reliable forensic methods, overcoming the media portrayals is extremely important if the findings are to be accepted by legal systems and the wider public.

As the discipline is so new, it has undergone an immense amount of change during its forty years of existence. In this paper, I will investigate the origins of body farms and how their research has changed in the last four decades. This will involve a review of past and contemporary research and methodological approaches. I believe that this is an important field of study as it involves building a refined body of evidence that allows for greater certainty regarding the factors affecting human decomposition. Findings from this avenue of research can provide evidence-based conclusions for use in criminal cases of homicide or allow for greater certainty in assigning an identification.

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More widely, it provides a larger body of evidence that can be used to accurately understand how the environment, human diet or medications, and medical conditions may affect the decomposition of human remains. Evidence has shown that human remains are just as variable as their living counterparts. By studying human remains, we will better appreciate how environmental factors interact to affect our bodies after death, which will help experts filter the noise when conducting a forensic analysis. Additionally, methods developed for analysing the site may aid in the interpretation of life from archaeological sites or historical burials.

I will also explore how research has been conducted at these sites, examining how methods have developed out of research concerned with decomposition of human remains, how the environmental or situational context of the remains affects decomposition, and how findings can be applied to improve current or create new forensic methods. When the first body farm opened in 1981 (Forbes 2017), little was known about the decomposition of a human corpse. Prior literature relied heavily on anecdotal reports of remains removed from burial sites or case reports, neither of which contributed reliable evidence (Forbes 2017). Until recently, a significant amount of our knowledge was based on analogues—primarily pigs (Schoenly and Hall 2001)—which has shaped our understanding of how human remains experience decomposition. Through thorough study, rigorously tested and reliable forensic methods can be created and refined using the findings produced at HTFs, methods that when applied will allow for a human death to be accurately analysed.

Finally, I will review the future of the field, exploring how the establishment of facilities around the world has contributed to our knowledge while also exploring the criticism and ethical issues researchers at HTFs face. I will also

briefly explore how researchers must acknowledge their portrayal in the media, explaining why I believe that they must establish a connection with the public and overcome the damaging misconceptions that have perpetuated.

## **The First Body Farm**

### *The Early Years*

In 1971, Dr. William M. Bass was hired to lead the Department of Anthropology at the University of Tennessee (Vidoli et al. 2017). Over time, he became the primary consulting forensic anthropologist in Tennessee and the south-eastern United States; however, despite his extensive experience and expertise in archaeology and anthropology, he soon came to realize how little was known about human decomposition (Vidoli et al. 2017). Our lack of knowledge significantly limited our ability to analyse remains in a way that yielded accurate and predictable results (Forbes 2017). At the time, academic literature on human decomposition relied heavily on anecdotal reports from archaeologists or forensic pathologists (Forbes 2017). Many of these reports reached contradictory conclusions, illustrating how little we knew about the numerous factors involved in decomposition (Vidoli et al. 2017). As a result, estimating the post-mortem interval (PMI)—commonly known as time since death—was overwhelmingly based on guesswork rather than empirical evidence (Vidoli et al. 2017).

In a particularly illustrative case from 1977, Bass would determine that systematic study of human decomposition was an essential aspect of understanding and creating useful tools to determine the PMI (Vidoli et al. 2017). When police were called to examine reports of a disturbed grave, they arrived to see a headless body resting upon a coffin (Dowd n.d.). Believing that the body could have been the result of a

murder, they began to search local missing persons reports (Dowd n.d.). When their search failed to yield a possible identification, Bass was called-in to aid in the removal and identification (Dowd n.d.).

Upon further investigation, the head was located, yet Bass initially estimated the PMI to be about 2 to 6 months (Dowd n.d.). When given the opportunity to take the remains back to his lab for further examination Bass would revise the corpses' PMI by 113 years, identifying the body as Colonel William Shy who had died during the American Civil War (Dowd n.d.). Bass's revision was aided by items of clothing manufactured with only natural fibres, inconsistent with modern textiles, and warpage to the skull, later determined to be caused by years of decomposition (Tennessee Division SCV n.d.). In an interview with the Nashville Banner in 1978, Bass stated, "I got the age, sex, race, height and weight right but I was off on the time of death by 113 years" (Traughber 2023). Bass's initial PMI estimate was so far off because Shy's corpse had been embalmed prior to its original burial, which significantly slowed the rate at which the body decomposed (Vidoli et al. 2017).

In analysing this case, I believe there are two potential lessons for the field. The first is a lesson of public relations. Forensic experts should not make their estimations public, as it can affect their credibility and may ultimately erode public confidence in the field when their claims are later contradicted (Press 2017). Additionally, because forensic experts can be called to give testimony in court — an adversarial system — where any error can be used to discredit the witness or evidence, it is important to not speak publicly on what you cannot confirm. The second lesson is that experts need to study human remains found in all conditions. Had Bass worked with more embalmed remains, he may have better

understood how to properly age Shy's remains from the start.

This story provides a cautionary tale of how important it is for forensic experts to undergo extensive training and speaks to the larger need for quality assurance, vigilance, and constant revision (Garrett et al. 2021; Grown and Martire 2020). Forensic Science exists within a liminal space, affected by changes of law and jurisprudence (Garrett et al. 2021), the police who investigate crimes and often are involved in collecting and securing evidence (Lambert et al. 2007), and the public who benefit from reliable and rigorously tested scientific methods (Kaplan, Ling, and Cuellar 2020; Marra and De Souza 2022).

It is no secret that to remain relevant and trustworthy, forensic scientists must develop and rely on a corpus of works that incorporate the latest ethical frameworks, scientific methods, corrections, and eliminations of erroneous methods or principles. There are far too many organisations, institutions, and journals in the sphere of forensic science that it simply becomes overwhelming when attempting to understand the consensus of several fields at once. In his foreword to *Skull Wars*, Vine Deloria Jr. (2000) suggests that the US concept of Restatements of the Law, authored by the American Law Institute, provides an authoritative secondary source that synthesizes and restates the current case law and statutes from various jurisdictions (Legal Information Institute 2020). Deloria Jr. (2000) states that this principle could easily be applied to the social sciences, but I believe this could also be applied by an interdisciplinary organisation for the various forensic sciences.

### ***Getting Ready for Research***

In 1980, Bass proposed establishing a facility that would research human decomposition (Vidoli et

al. 2017). Intrigued, the University Administration granted him a small parcel of wooded land behind the University of Tennessee Medical Center, 6 km from the main campus (Vidoli et al. 2017). The establishment of the Anthropology Research Facility (ARF) marked the first systematic study of human decomposition in a controlled outdoor research environment (Forbes 2017). The initial facility was small, measuring a mere 4.9 m<sup>2</sup> and comprising of a concrete floor protected by a wire cage. In 1987, it was determined that the original ARF would be unable to meet the growing demands of research. As a result, Bass opened the Forensic Anthropology Center (FAC) as a permanent research centre within the Department of Anthropology (Vidoli et al. 2017).

Protected by its isolation, the facility and its research co-existed peacefully with the local community (Vidoli et al. 2017). However, in the mid-1980s, the UT Medical Center expanded their parking lot, which brought the facility to the attention of local community members. Displeased, they formed Solutions to Issues of Concerned Knoxvilleans (SICK) to protest the facility (Vidoli et al. 2017). Protests quickly died down after the introduction of a privacy barrier and a chain link fence, and although the facility has expanded several times, it has not met any similar resistance since (Vidoli et al. 2017). I will later explore how communities are not always receptive to the establishment of a HTF near them, analysing how this tension affects researchers, the research that is conducted, and perceptions of the discipline.

### ***Gaining Access to Cadavers***

To ensure the research facility would have access to human cadavers, Bass established a formal body donation programme in 1981 (Vidoli et al. 2017). Unlike most anatomical gift programmes,

all human remains become part of the permanent collection at the FAC (Forensic Anthropology Center 2022b). When bodies arrive at the FAC, they are sent to the ARF to naturally decompose. Once the remains have completely skeletonised, they are recovered and cleaned (Forensic Anthropology Center 2022b). Once cleaning is complete, the bones are accessioned into the Bass Donated Skeletal Collection, where they are measured and analysed before they can be studied by researchers (Forensic Anthropology Center 2022b).

In its first year, the Body Donation Programme received four cadavers; in its second year it received only one (Vidoli et al. 2017). Although the number of donations to the programme increased steadily in its second decade of operation, the number has skyrocketed since the early 2000s, so much so that in 2012, the FAC began tracking the number of donations they turn away each year (Vidoli et al. 2017). Despite the concerns or protests that are often raised during the planning of HTFs, the steady growth of body donations shows a clearly vested public interest in supporting this research. It should be noted that donations only began to increase after depictions of forensic science became a reoccurring and popular theme in pop-culture and media (Shirley, Wilson, and Jantz 2011).

In the early years, many of the bodies obtained by the ARF were those of unclaimed remains donated by the State Medical Examiner (Shirley, Wilson, and Jantz 2011). As a result, little was known about the donors. In 1999 (Forensic Anthropology Center 2022c), as the number of donations increased, the FAC developed a screening process that documents characteristics of a person's life and physical attributes—a non-exhaustive list including handedness, education level, occupation, and

**Table 1.** Summary of Racial Identifiers

Race Identifier <sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</sup>	Associated Continent
White	Europe/North America
Black	African American and/or Africa
Asian	Asia/Asian-American/Indigenous people of North America*

\* This is a historical grouping originating from Trotter and Gleser (1952; 1958)

1. (Hefner 2009)

2. (Hefner et al. 2015)

3. (Klales and Kenyhercz 2015)

4. (Bodoh 2017)

5. (Atkinson and Tallman 2020)

ancestry—data that is stored so it can be used when examining the skeletonised remains (Shirley, Wilson, and Jantz 2011). By developing a robust documented collection, forensic anthropologists can test and refine existing techniques, as well as develop new methods while training a new generation of experts (Vidoli et al. 2017).

A significant benefit of this detailed inventory is the amount of context retained, as it allows for a greater amalgamation of life and bio histories. Because researchers are informed of significant life-events that may have shaped the bones, the room for guesswork and variation in expert opinions are reduced. As of 2018, the Bass Donated Skeletal Collection is comprised of more than 1,800 individuals, with birth years ranging from 1892 to 2016, of both sexes, and all adult ranges (Forensic Anthropology Center 2022a). The collection also contains a small sample of forty-two infant and foetal remains, and forty-seven cremated remains (also known as “cremains”) (Forensic Anthropology Center 2022a).

Prior to the mid-1980s, forensic identification criteria were based off of earlier anatomical studies conducted on nineteenth-century skeletons in the Terry or Hamann-Todd anatomical collections (Ousley and Jantz 1998). While the history of physical anthropology and anatomical collections is

outside the scope of this paper, both have a long history of inequitable and unethical curation in terms of the populations they have studied (Campanacho, Alves Cardoso, and Ubelaker 2021). However, the methods developed out of the Terry, Hamann-Todd, and W.M. Cobb collections would provide the basis for modern documented skeletal collections (Campanacho, Alves Cardoso, and Ubelaker 2021).

Using historical populations for modern forensic analysis is untenable because of the physical changes that have occurred to the modern population of the United States (Cardoso 2007; Godde 2017). While this is not the place to discuss it, we must also consider how our current methods rely on historic conceptualisations of race and related hierarchies. These methods assume that we can confidently identify people to American conceptualisations of race based on continental origin, which I have presented in Table 1. Using such large social conceptualisations of affinity translates poorly to biological models based on osteological morphology or genetics (Atkinson and Tallman 2020; Jeong and Jantz 2016; Tallman, Parr, and Winburn 2021; Winburn and Algee-Hewitt 2021). This presents significant issues for the reliability of methods that attempt to identify a racial background or other form of biological affinity, as it increases the ambiguity surrounding what the identifiers actually constitute.

One significant advantage of the FAC Skeletal Collection is the inclusion of the detailed descriptions in the Forensic Data Bank, a repository that holds detailed demographic information of contemporary individuals (Jantz and Moore-Jansen 1987). This data comprises a sizeable portion of the sample used in FORDISC, a statistical programme designed to assess biological markers to aid identification (Manthey and Jantz 2020). It is important to note that while the FAC Skeletal Collection is more representative of the current population than anatomical collections, it is still a poor representation of the overall variety found in both the United States and the world more broadly (Campanacho, Alves Cardoso, and Ubelaker 2021).

### ***Legacy on Current Research***

Since the ARF opened in 1981, it has become the most known Human Taphonomic Research Facility. Its notoriety has opened the doors for widespread acceptance of so-called body farms (Pecsi et al. 2020). Early studies at ARF focused on how bodies decomposed within a site; however, researchers soon realised that decomposition is a complex phenomenon influenced by the interaction of a large number of variables (Wallman 2017). Therefore, to truly understand decomposition, it is important to understand exactly how these factors interact and affect each other (Wolff 2015). As a result, researchers changed how they approached their work, introducing the need for an interdisciplinary approach.

One specific example is the integration of forensic entomology, which combines knowledge of insect activity and development to provide insight into the time since death (Wallman 2017). However, unlike on television, forensic entomology is much more limited in what it can

achieve (MacGregor, Wood, and Brecknell 1996). Of the numerous techniques that exist, many are expensive, possess limited accuracy, or only apply within a limited window of time after death (MacGregor, Wood, and Brecknell 1996; Wallman 2017). Additionally, regions may lack experts with sufficient knowledge, which means this area may not be included in a forensic investigation.

Forensic entomology relies on two major aspects of insect activity: the ecological succession and the development of immature insects (Villet, Richards, and Midgley 2010). Because insects take time to infest remains, entomology is only prepared to provide an estimate of minimum PMI, not the actual time of death (Wallman 2017). If a body has been kept indoors for a period of time and is later brought outside, the insects would only establish a significant presence after they have been exposed to the body (Villet, Richards, and Midgley 2010). In this example, an estimate of PMI could only be created for when insect activity began, which creates an undeterminable window of time from when the person was last seen alive and the commencement of insect activity in which their death could have occurred (Wallman 2017).

A major finding produced by the ARF that would shape the development of the field is their work on the reliability of pigs and other non-human remains as a proxy for human decomposition (Forbes 2017; Schoenly and Hall 2001). Unfortunately, a recently published study that sought to replicate this work found that the ecological studies conducted on non-human remains do not always provide an accurate model to describe or forensically analyse the decomposition of humans (Wolfe Steadman 2018). In her study, Dawnie Wolfe Steadman (2018) found that while pig and human decomposition resemble each other much more significantly than that of rabbits, they are still a

poor proxy for simulating the effects of seasonal weather changes, insect activity, and predation.

Additionally, because the decomposition differs so greatly between rabbits and humans, it is hard to make a useful comparison that yields any reliable results (Wolfe Steadman 2018). She concluded that pigs make a poor proxy for studying human decomposition, but due to their lower intraspecific variation — the reasons for which could use greater examination — they would be better suited for creating ecological baselines of a site. Finally, Wolfe Steadman (2018) concluded that data collected for forensic analysis would better reflect the variability of decomposition if it was collected through the study of humans.

As evidenced by the above examples, since the ARF first opened in 1981, it has fostered the development and integration of novel ways of researching ecological and taphonomic processes that have provided critical insights into our practices as a field. This has led to the development and implementation of standardized and evidence-based analytical methods, while integrating knowledge from several subdisciplines of forensics to create a cohesive understanding of sites and the decomposition process.

## **Looking to the Future**

### ***The Benefits***

By studying human decomposition in conjunction with the taphonomy and ecology of a site, we are better prepared to understand how the environment is affected by the introduction of plant or animal remains, i.e., changes in pH, surface vegetation, or carrion insect activity (Rodriguez and Bass 1985). We are also better informed at determining how the site affects decomposition, including factors such as depth of

burial, moisture, humidity, and temperature (Tumer et al. 2013). By understanding how these factors interact with each other, given the context and location the forensic expert is working in, they are able to determine the PMI, cause or circumstances of death, or location of secreted remains (Bytheway et al. 2015; Schotsmans, Márquez-Grant, and Forbes 2017; Stefanuto et al. 2014; Varlet et al. 2020).

Additionally, as we increase our knowledge of site ecology and human taphonomy, we are better prepared to train the next generation of experts, law enforcement, and current practitioners (Vidoli et al. 2017). The FAC has become one of the most prominent HTFs and is one of the best training facilities due to its large Skeletal Collection and access to cadavers (Shirley, Wilson, and Jantz 2011). They have also partnered with various law enforcement agencies, such as the FBI, or forensic organisations to provide first-hand access to training (Shirley, Wilson, and Jantz 2011).

### ***Public Perception***

Attempts to establish HTFs are often met with fierce public resistance. Particularly relevant examples include the facility proposed by Carson-Newman University, Tennessee in 2012 and the proposed UK facilities in 2011 (Hart 2017) and 2019 (Adam 2019). When Carson-Newman University announced plans for an HTF they were met with intense protests, ultimately escalating to lawsuit and, although the University was granted planning permission, the project was put on an indefinite hold in 2014 (Vidoli et al. 2017).

Plans to open the first HTF in the UK were so poorly received by the public and academics that it was dead-on-arrival (Hart 2017). In 2019, when plans to establish a body farm in the UK were leaked to the public, it was met by intense

public scrutiny (Adam 2019). However, because the site was to be operated by the British Military, additional information was not made public (Adam 2019). That said, British academics have been increasingly vocal in their support for establishing a HTF (Adam 2019; Williams, Cassella, and Pringle 2019; Williams, Rogers, and Cassella 2019). One vocal proponent has been Anna Williams, who points out that much of the research on human taphonomy has come from the United States (Banino 2022), which undermines the reliability of such methods when applied in a context for which they may not necessarily localise.

As additional HTFs open around the world, it appears that sourcing a location has become a significant aspect of opening the facility. Given how difficult opening past facilities has been, researchers must attempt to find suitable sites that will not significantly impact the surrounding area and peoples (Pecsi et al. 2020). This will hopefully reduce the amount of pushback researchers receive from community members who are concerned that such a facility would disrupt their neighbourhood spirit.

### *Criticism*

Anthropological research facilities have often been criticized for how poorly they respond to the rhetoric and descriptions in public media. A concern shared by some researchers is that the value of human taphonomic research may be erased by negative media portrayals that sensationalise the work of forensic science (Adam 2019; Black 2017; Black 2019). However, there is growing consensus among forensic experts that research on humans is the best for developing forensic tools (Forbes 2017; Wescott 2018; Wolfe Steadman 2018).

Additionally, in the interest of developing ethically sourced research and collections, HTFs

should rely on cadaver donations from decedents that expressly give permission to be a part of this process. Historically, human osteological collections have not been curated in ways that are considered ethical by the standards of modern research and museum collection development (Campanacho, Alves Cardoso, and Ubelaker 2021; Licata and Monza 2017; Ross and Williams 2021). As HTFs rely on people choosing to donate their remains (Garment et al. 2007), it is in researchers' best interests to ensure people are still satisfied that they are leaving their remains in the right hands.

However, as ethical frameworks continue to evolve, we must re-evaluate our practices and procedures to ensure compliance with the most current principles. It is also important to remember that each situation is unique, and a solution—especially one reached through compromise—may not be suitable for another location. For example, some body farms continue to accept unclaimed remains from morgues (Bishop 2022). Are we allowed to perform destructive experimentation on human remains, with or without permission? Is it okay to keep remains forever or only for a short period of time? These are some of the questions we need to be aware of, and more importantly address, as part of our responsibility not only to our respective disciplines, but also to the people we serve.

Sue Black (2017) has been the most vocal forensics expert when it comes to arguing against the need for human research facilities. She believes that analogues provide an accurate insight into decomposition while avoiding the problems associated with human emotions and conceptions of death. Personally, I understand her perspective, especially since analogues can provide useful insights into the ecological conditions that humans cannot (Wolfe Steadman 2018). However, I believe the mounting evidence



indicates that, when possible, we should use human remains when creating forensic methods and tools that will be used on humans. One of her major points is that media descriptions or even the term “body farm” are disrespectful and may actively disincentivize the public from wanting to know more about forensics or make them less willing to donate their bodies, which limits researchers’ ability to conduct their work. Due to HTFs existence within an ethical grey area where they are often not subject to the same oversight or regulatory frameworks mandated for living human subjects or animal research (Bytheway et al. 2015), HTFs are somewhat free to self-regulate by creating their own ethical guidelines and best-practices (Bytheway et al. 2015; Varlet et al. 2020).

If the increase in body donations is a reliable indicator of public interest in HTFs—a theory supported by ethnographic research conducted by Hilary M. Martinez (2013) on why people choose to donate their remains to the programme run by the Forensic Anthropology Center at Texas State University (FACTS)—public support is higher than ever. However, if public opinion was to change significantly, knowledge would become isolated to academics, allowing the perpetuation of false and harmful depictions that are portrayed by the media. The ability to establish a long-term facility is incredibly important to this research, but finding a suitable site while not disturbing or upsetting the local people can be extremely difficult, as documented in Pecsí et al. (2020) when they attempted to locate a site for REST[ES], the first HTF in Canada. Given that decomposition can vary significantly by region, it is important for sites to be spread out so findings can be replicated or corrected to that specific environment (Wolff 2015). Finally, a major argument for this research is to create reliable methods that can be used in the legal system

(Wescott 2018). If the public or the courts cannot see the value in the research, methods, or experts, they will not be called upon to provide answers or analysis, even if they do have an answer. Research at body farms is still relatively new, therefore it is incumbent upon researchers to work with the public, showing them how important these studies can be and why the media portrayals are inaccurate depictions of their work.

## Conclusion

Despite the considerable progress forensic taphonomy has made in recent decades, it is only the beginning. It seems laughable, looking back, that William Bass once thought his work at the Anthropology Research Facility would be a finite endeavour (Vidoli et al. 2017). In a review of studies presented at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences between 2002 to 2018, Wescott (2018) found that the average number of presentations on decomposition jumped from 8–9 to 35 per year. This shows how significantly the field has changed and grown in the span of two decades. Much of the current research remains exploratory, a reflection of how the goals of the field have expanded to foster a much more interdisciplinary approach to their work. Additionally, when new research is published, we are often left with more questions than answers, displaying how much we have yet to learn.

We, as forensic experts whose work is inherently interdisciplinary, may benefit from greater consolidation. In Vine Deloria Jr’s foreword to *Skull Wars* (Deloria Jr. 2000), he proposes that the social sciences and humanities could greatly benefit from employing the practice known as restatements: documents published by the American Law Institute to clarify the law as a secondary authority (Legal Information Institute 2020). I believe that this practice could successfully reduce the confusion caused by

having to sort through journals, books, and institutional and individual practices. While various professional organisations have made moves to provide greater oversight and professional guidance, these are often piecemeal in fashion and do not provide comprehensive guidance for all disciplines. However, this proposal should be further examined at a later point and in greater detail.

In recent years, the field has seen an increase in support not only by fellow academics, but also the general public. However, researchers must continue to work tirelessly to correct the inaccurate and gruesome conceptions of the field which are the product of sensationalised portrayals in the news, television, and books. Just like the “CSI Effect” (Alldredge 2015), certain portions of the public have latched onto the negative aspects of these descriptions. If forensic methods are to gain real acceptance in the eye of the public and courts of law, it is incumbent on experts to reach out and commit to more public outreach. Additionally, forensic anthropology must adopt more standardised methodologies, which allow for greater replication of our work. In view of the fact that a key goal of forensic anthropology is to provide evidence in court cases, it is essential for our work to minimise the potential for error or situations where our analysis is unsupported because it cannot be substantiated by further testing.

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